

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

Guitarist

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Hendrix

The Lost Guitar

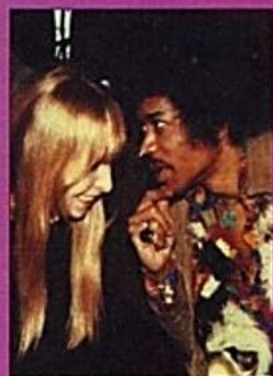
THE NIGHT JIMI DIED
Monika Dannemann's untold story





Photos courtesy of Monika Dannemann

Jimi told me I was the one to spread his message



Monika Dannemann

A quarter of a century on from Jimi Hendrix's tragic death, most of the real facts remain clouded by falsehood, speculation and myth. One woman holds the key to setting the record straight about the Jimi Hendrix mystery once and for all, having shared his life, his love and his final hours. Monika Dannemann broke the silence of 25 years to tell Tim Slater the truth behind her relationship with Jimi and to allow *Guitarist* exclusive access to Jimi's all time favourite axe – the famous black Fender Stratocaster on which he composed his final, unheard song *The Story Of Life*



Read virtually any one of the hundreds of books and articles published about Jimi Hendrix and you'll be lucky to find any section which covers Hendrix's relationship with his German born fiancée Monika Dannemann in any detail. Hendrix folklore usually splits Dannemann's role into two distinctly conflicting but equally distorted images: the kindest casually dismiss her as a mere footnote in the complex web of relationships that ran through his life. But the cruellest would have her denigrated and reviled; either held up as part of innumerable conspiracy theories concerning plots to deliberately endanger the guitarist's life or, even more cruelly, simply depict her as little more than a hapless groupie who dithered whilst the guitarist's life ebbed away in front of her.

Monika continues to protest that neither of these 'theories' begins to get anywhere near the truth but it has to be asked why the facts surrounding Hendrix's untimely demise were distorted so quickly and why Monika herself was overlooked as a vital witness to those last moments, especially regarding the botched attempt to save his life. Also, as a young woman alone in a foreign country struggling to cope with the death of the man she loved, Monika received remarkably little public or private sympathy from the media or even those who knew both her and Jimi. The results now sadly speak for themselves as the common misconception of Hendrix's last month's pictures him as a drug addled, uninspired wreck, spiralling toward an inevitable headlining spot at the Great Festival In The Sky.

For these reasons Monika Dannemann opted to shy away from major publicity concerning both herself and Jimi and now lives in retreat on the Sussex coast. There, she has quietly dedicated herself to keeping the memory of the Hendrix she knew alive in preparation for the time when she feels it's right to reveal the truth behind her tragically brief but deeply intimate and incisive relationship with probably the most famous guitarist who ever lived.

In an effort to put the record straight once and for all, Monika has prepared a book about her life with Jimi. *The Inner World Of Jimi Hendrix* (published by Bloomsbury) includes detailed analysis of his music complemented by Monika's beautiful paintings of Jimi plus a poignant collection of photographs of him taken by Monika less than 24 hours before his death. When Monika agreed to talk to *Guitarist* exclusively about why she feels the right time has arrived to break her silence, both parties were cautious at first but as we spoke, a picture of Jimi Hendrix began to emerge which suggests a far deeper and more mature musician than the two dimensional caricature portrayed in the general media.

"About a year after Jimi's death I tried to approach the press and explain to them that the way they described his death as being from a drugs overdose was not reality, but none of the newspapers were interested," she affirms. "So I started to write everything down after the first year but I wanted it to be in a really true book about Jimi and his message. The main reason I really did it was because of the image that Jimi is still mainly portrayed with. The way they label

him is a completely false picture of the person I knew and also the person that other people who were very close to him knew. I always hoped that some book would come that explained the real Jimi but unfortunately the people who wrote the books either didn't know him or they didn't touch on his personality. They just talked about tours and he played there and there and there but they don't really mention *Jimi*. With Jimi himself it wasn't just his music, it came out from the man himself. He was such a fascinating character and the music he produced was so very special because he was very special.

"The reason why I haven't done anything up till now was because I don't like publicity and I just want my privacy; but I realised that I *have* to do this and write down what I know because it seems that nobody else is going to do it. I promised Jimi that I would spread his message that he tried to spread through his music and through his lyrics and he said himself that I was the one to fulfil the promise."

Monika's image of Jimi conflicts continually with the one placed within the public's focus.

"Even the idea of burning the guitar wasn't Jimi's idea it was a journalist's! Chas Chandler (*Hendrix's original manager and producer*) saw the impact on the media and so they built on that, but it was nothing but an act. Jimi recognised after about a year and a half that it had actually *damaged* his reputation very badly and he tried very hard to rectify this for the last two and a half years of his life. Unfortunately very few interviews have come out when you see the true depths that Jimi had. When he came to England there were a few interviews he gave just before his death where people realised that here wasn't a wild man, one of them even called him 'Gentleman Jimi' because they were just beginning to realise that he was totally the opposite of what we had been hearing about all this time.

"Before I met Jimi I came from a family where I was very much protected and I'd never been with a musician in all my life. It was always my dream to meet a regular guy, definitely not someone like Jimi. The year before I met him I heard

his music for the first time just by chance over Radio Caroline and I couldn't stop listening, it was like music from another planet! It impressed me so much I started to buy his records but that was all. I was so naive at the time that I believed all the stories in the newspapers about him.

"In Germany there was a headline just before he came there that said Mothers, Lock Your Daughters Away – Jimi Hendrix Is Coming! I believed these kind of things and so he was the last person I wanted to meet. I went with my brother to see the concert and I had the chance to go backstage but I didn't want to meet him – period! We sat in the hotel bar and then Mitch came in with a couple of people and then Jimi came in and sat right next to me. I wanted to just vanish into thin air but he started talking to me. I was so tense because of who I thought he was but during the conversation I quickly realised that he was so gentle and so concerned. I mean, he wasn't selfish or anything, he wanted to know every little detail about my life and the way he was, I can hardly describe it, but it was so beautiful in a way that I realised something was wrong here, the image of him was wrong, you know? Then slowly but surely I started to fall in love and that's the way that our relationship started. The next day he asked me to come with him to



Cologne and I was so confused because that was the last thing I expected. I went with him on tour for a couple of days but then because there were some heavy, violent scenes going on he became worried for my safety. One time just before playing in Cologne there was a massive crowd of people at the back of the hall and they were grabbing and tearing at him, almost tearing him apart and we almost lost each other in the crowd. It was very scary and after the same gig we went into the car and people jumped onto the roof of the car and more and more people were surging towards the car and [tour manager] Gerry Stickells became very alarmed and said, 'Let's get the hell out of here!' Jimi was very concerned that somebody would harm me or spike my drink so he said it would be better for us to live in London after the tour, which we did."

If, by Monika's own admission, her genteel and sheltered upbringing left her little prepared for life with Jimi, when her parents discovered their beloved daughter was shackled up with the insatiable 'Wild Man Of Rock' as depicted in the press – it must surely have been the stuff of every parent's nightmares?

"Mum said as long as I'm happy, she's happy. My father was a very conservative person although he wasn't a racist at all but he said that Jimi and I would be very unhappy because there are so many people who are racist. Later when he found out that we had got engaged and wanted to get married he said that our children would be mixed race and they would always suffer and so on but I tried to explain to him that our love, the strong love we felt for each other, would overcome these things."

"At the beginning of March Jimi got an engagement ring and I thought it would be just a secret engagement, especially as my parents didn't know yet. But when we went to the Speakeasy that evening he suddenly stood up and then he went from one table to the next telling everybody we were engaged and showing off our engagement rings. I was so embarrassed and I said to him, 'Why didn't you ask me?' And he said because he knew I would have said no because I wanted my parents to know first. I couldn't tell my father over the telephone because it was such a delicate matter but that's how we got engaged. That was in March 1969 and he had to go to New York at the end of March. I went back to Germany to tell my parents and Jimi was going to fly in later. I didn't dare tell my parents for about four days because I was afraid of my father's reaction but when I did finally tell my father he only wanted to meet Jimi and make up his own mind. He said he just wanted me to be happy and if Jimi was to be the one so be it, but he was still very concerned about children."

Prior to Jimi flying to England for the Isle Of Wight Festival in August 1970 Monika secured a small basement flat for herself and Jimi beneath the Samarkand Hotel in Lansdowne Crescent, Notting Hill Gate. The tiny flat, with a small walled garden and gateway to a private park provided the couple with a means to escape the rapidly escalating tide of excitement surrounding Jimi's imminent arrival. He hadn't played a concert in the UK since an appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in February 1969 and Hendrix's British fans and friends in the press were all keen to see him again – despite Hendrix's worries to the contrary.

"Mike Jeffery [his former manager] told Jimi that he was finished

in Europe! Jimi told me that he wanted very much to tour in Europe but Jeffery had given Jimi and Mitch misinformation that Jimi was finished here and that no promoters wanted to book him for concerts. Jimi was a very insecure person privately and he believed a lot of this to be true until he came to England for the last time and he saw how pleased people were to see him and how things really were. He had a mission he had to fulfil and nothing could stop him."

"Another thing was that people think that he had no music left after 'Electric Ladyland' but this also isn't true. He had a lot of ideas musically, people say that he had lost inspiration and was burnt out but actually the opposite was happening. He was developing a new style of music. It was like a child that is growing but is not yet born, all he needed was one maybe two more months to complete a piece and I'm sure that he would have come out with music that was even more amazing than it was before. First of all he wanted to keep a small group and he also wanted a big group, almost like an orchestra where they would play his music so that people could listen to his music and not have to look at him. His music was his

life and his tool to give out a certain message which was peace, love, brotherhood and freedom and for people to find themselves and start to change this planet into a better world. That was his main concern and that is the reason that he felt he was here, to help a little bit towards that goal."

Hendrix's inconsistent but courageous performance at the Isle Of Wight revealed much of the great strain the guitarist had been labouring under during the past few months. Torn between fulfilling the commitments heaped upon him by his management and the driving need to prepare the ground for the second great period of his work, he badly needed to take time out to consider his next move. As it went fate quickly stepped in to lend a hand – the European tour suddenly ground to a disastrous halt when bassist Billy Cox suffered a nervous breakdown and Hendrix wearily rejoined Monika in London for a well earned rest. The

morning of Thursday September 17th saw Hendrix and Monika begin drawing up plans for Jimi's long awaited follow up to 'Electric Ladyland'.

"We got up about midday and spoke a lot about paintings he wanted me to do in regard to certain songs and then he asked me to do the photos. The last thing before he died he asked me to take some pictures of him and the only reason for that was that he wanted me to do some paintings of him. When I met him I was just a skating teacher. When Jimi saw my paintings he said to me, 'I want you to put a message across with each painting just like I do with my songs. He wanted us to join forces, especially in 1970 to help to change his image and spread his message.'

"He wanted me to help him with posters and record sleeves because he was so disappointed and embarrassed with things like 'Electric Ladyland'. One day I think we were in Carnaby Street and I saw it in the shop window and pulled him over and he was trying to pull away. I said to him, 'How come?' and he said he'd actually wanted a cover with him and Mitch and Noel sitting on an Alice In Wonderland statue with all little different children around. What came out was the naked women. That's why I came to take the last photos because he wanted to take control."

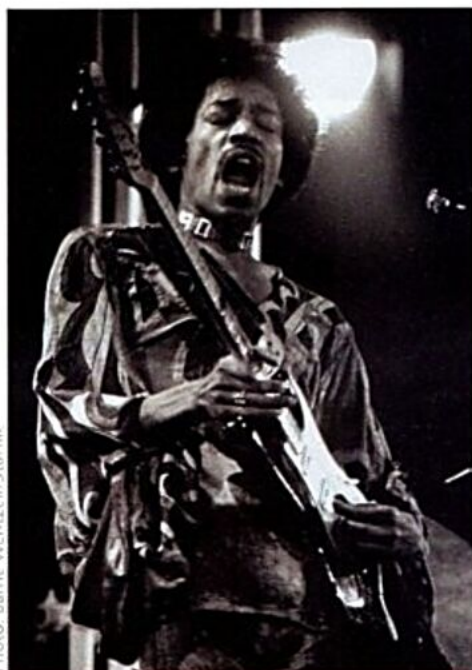
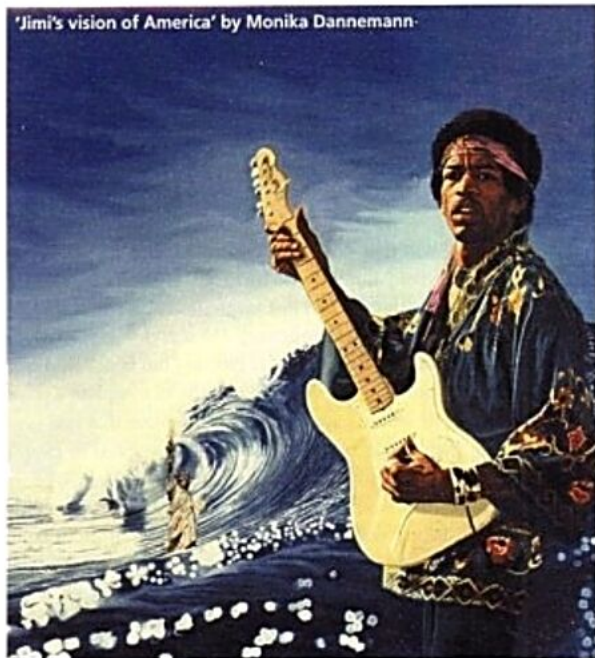


Photo: Barrie Wortzel/Starfile

'Jimi's vision of America' by Monika Dannemann



- After taking the photos, which depict Jimi sipping tea in the park at the rear of their flat, Jimi and Monika continued to spend most of the day together, eventually ending up at Ronnie Scott's club in Soho where he had been invited to jam with Eric Burdon's new group, War.

"Jimi got up to play with Eric Burdon's group. I asked him to because I hadn't seen him on the tour and the only group in town for him to play with was Eric Burdon's group. While he was playing Devon came along [*Devon Wilson: a former girlfriend of Hendrix's who died under mysterious circumstances in New York's notorious Chelsea Hotel in 1973*]. She made some very nasty remarks and I didn't tell Jimi but he realised something was wrong and he decided that he had to tell Devon to either become our friend or leave our life forever.

"So around one o'clock he said I have to speak to her now because I know where she is. He wanted me to come with him but I wasn't too happy because I feared there might be a showdown. In the end he realised that maybe it was better just to do it himself so I drove him to the flat and left him there and he asked me to call for him after 20 minutes or so. I came to pick him up and when he came out of the house, he opened his hand and there were at least six or seven different kinds of drugs that they gave him. I said, Did you take any and he said no and just threw them down the drain. People always just assumed, even when I was with Jimi, that he wanted to take every kind of drug you could think about and they were offended when you said no thank you. Jimi was just the kind of person who couldn't say no because he didn't like to offend people but then he would just throw them away. He said to me that he tried to speak to Devon but she was completely stoned and so he would try to speak to her the next day.

"Afterwards we just stayed together talking. We were always talking for hours about his songs and the ideas that he had and the things he wanted to do. I always loved listening to him because he said so many interesting things, he was a very spiritual person and he had a lot of psychic experiences and I never got enough of the stories that he told me. I wanted to know the inner meaning of every single one of his songs, I always had the feeling that there was much more behind the song than the few words that were there.

"He had a very heavy schedule the next day. In the morning he had to go to his record company because of a single that he wanted to release, he had to see his lawyer, he had to see Chas Chandler, he

"I was crying, the tears were streaming but the moment I entered this tiny little room I couldn't cry any more. He just looked so peaceful, it was unbelievable. He looked just like he was asleep and the most amazing thing of all, there was a little smile on his face"

had to see Mitch Mitchell – it was a completely booked day. He felt he needed a sleep before all of this which is quite natural and I said to him, Let's wait a little bit longer and see if you can't get to sleep naturally because I was against taking sleeping tablets as well. He said all right and kept on talking and I must admit though that when it got to about half past six in the morning I thought I will never make this day – I was so exhausted because we always went very late to bed. That morning I secretly took a sleeping pill, which is something I would never normally do. I'd had two operations and these tablets were given to me to help me sleep but I didn't like to take them. I had hidden them in a cupboard but Jimi had already taken one a few days earlier when he couldn't sleep so he knew the sleeping tablets' effect. I secretly took one because if he knew I'd taken one he'd immediately take one too! The last thing I remember was quarter past seven when we were talking and Jimi realised I was falling asleep. I woke up about 20 past 10 in the morning and Jimi was facing me. He was just sleeping normally and I tried to go to sleep again because I was so knackered, I'd only been asleep a couple of hours and I needed more than that! But after about 20 minutes my mind was already focusing on all the things we had to do this day and so I got up but I was tip toeing because I wanted Jimi to get as much sleep as possible."

After breakfasting and checking to see that Jimi was okay Monika slipped out to buy some cigarettes. On returning to the darkened flat she sat next to the bed to light a cigarette and suddenly noticed something was amiss.

"I saw something trickling out of the side of his mouth. I immediately tried to wake him up in various ways but I couldn't wake him up. In Germany what you do then is to call your doctor to get help, not the ambulance because the doctor knows the history of the patient and in those days the doctor was more qualified in every way than an ambulance man.

"I knew the name of the doctor but when I looked in the telephone book there were about 20 doctors with the same name. I thought I'd give an acquaintance of mine, Alvenia Bridges who knew people in the music business, a call to see if she knew the doctor's number. She didn't and said that I should call an ambulance. I agreed because there was no other way to get medical attention to Jimi. Then all of a sudden Eric Burdon came on the phone and he said, What's going on? I said that Jimi had taken some sleeping tablets, he is sick and I can't wake him up and I'm calling the ambulance. Eric said wait and maybe he'll wake up by himself and I replied that I couldn't take the risk and I was calling the ambulance at once. I called the ambulance and told them to hurry up. When I came back from buying the cigarettes Jimi had turned, he was lying on his side so it was easy for the vomit to get out.

"I took Jimi's pulse which I knew how to do properly because I ➤

► had done the same for my father after he had suffered a very heavy heart attack. I compared his pulse with mine and his was strong and it was very slightly slower than mine so I didn't worry too much. Then the ambulance men arrived. They also took his pulse, they checked his heart and they looked into his eyes. One of the ambulance men turned to me and said he's just in a very deep sleep, he'll be walking out of the hospital this afternoon laughing about the whole affair but we should take him there just to make sure that he is fine. I was worried but I wasn't panicking. They put Jimi on this chair because our basement flat had a spiral staircase and they couldn't get him up the stairs on a stretcher. They put the chair in the ambulance and I got in with Jimi and this guy, the other one was driving. While we were in the ambulance one strange thing was that there was a hospital just around the corner but they radioed that this was full and they should go to the next one so it took another 10 minutes more for them to get there. But while we were driving Jimi was sitting in the chair and his head kept falling forwards and this guy kept pushing it backwards and it wasn't until later that I was told that the best position when somebody has taken sleeping tablets and they are sick is to lay him on the floor and turn the head to the side so that the stuff can flow out and they can breathe."

Monika is adamant that when the ambulance arrived at St Mary Abbot's Hospital Jimi was still very much alive.

"Jimi was alive when we got to the hospital and I spoke to a doctor and showed him the tablets. I still had a funny feeling and twice I went to the emergency room where they were working on Jimi and I saw one doctor and one nurse working on him before another nurse pushed me outside."

Now gripped by a hideous sensation that something was dreadfully wrong, Monika knew she had to do something.

"I thought that I have to get a male - I have to get somebody who will really push them so I called Alvenia and asked her to call Gerry Stickells to come as quickly as possible, he would sort them out. When Alvenia arrived a nurse came out and told us that Jimi's heart had stopped but they'd managed to get it going again and not to worry about it."

Conflicting reports abound in popular Hendrix mythology regarding the exact location of Jimi's death. A statement issued at the time seems to allege at first that Jimi was merely unconscious when he arrived at the hospital then contradicts itself by stating that he had died earlier, either at the flat or in the ambulance.

"This is ridiculous because they tried to save him for at least 25 to 30 minutes and you don't do that with a dead person!"

As the two women waited for Stickells, a nurse appeared with the terrible news that Jimi was dead.

"I was crying, the tears were streaming but the moment I entered this tiny little room I couldn't cry any more. He just looked so peaceful, it was unbelievable. He looked just like he was asleep and the most amazing thing of all, there was a little smile on his face. Alvenia was also crying but when she stepped into the room she couldn't cry anymore either."

Within hours of Hendrix's passing the media went into overdrive, seemingly bent on proving that his death was a direct result of drug abuse and the merest hint of the involvement of sleeping tablets was all they needed. For this reason, the vital sympathy vote that might have directed the focus of blame towards those who Monika believes were really responsible was lost forever. The flames of controversy were further fanned when Eric Burdon appeared on a chat show a few days later waving a clutch of Jimi's lyrics written in the flat the night before he died. Burdon claimed it was a suicide note and his allegations helped throw the whole affair off on a completely different tangent, especially when it became clear that Hendrix had taken no less than *nine* sleeping tablets, even though it was proved the actual dose wasn't anywhere near fatal.

Monika tried valiantly to redress the balance in Hendrix's favour

"He wanted me to help him with posters and record sleeves because he was so disappointed and embarrassed with things like 'Electric Ladyland'. He'd actually wanted a cover with him and Mitch and Noel sitting on an Alice In Wonderland statue with all little different children around. What came out was the naked women"

but the damage had been done and she was left alone to pick up the pieces of her shattered life. The woman who was effectively Hendrix's widow soon found out that most of those who had been present while Hendrix lived soon made themselves scarce when the chips were down.

"I tried, but everybody closed me off, wouldn't let me see the TV or a newspaper or anything and the coroner said to me not to say *anything* about his death until after the inquest. Funnily enough, none of the people who were playing with Jimi contacted me, none of them were interested in how he died, why he died or anything. I only know one thing that Jimi said to me: he felt that he had not one *real* friend in the whole world. He knew a lot of people and he liked Mitch very much and they had a very good relationship music-wise but in their private lives they went their own separate ways. The only ones who cared and were nice were Jeff Beck and Marc Bolan but out of all of Jimi's closest associates, not one, not a single one. Jimi's family were very sweet and nice to me but otherwise no one..."

WIN

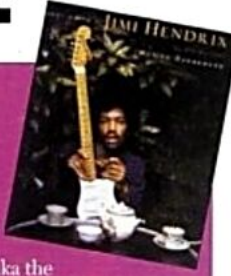
one of three signed copies of Monika

Dannemann's fascinating and genuinely moving book about the life and work of Jimi Hendrix. The Inner World Of Jimi Hendrix finally gives Monika the chance to tell the truth about her relationship with Jimi and how he instructed her to spread his artistic message to others.

To win one all you have to do is answer these three easy Hendrixian riddles:

- 1 What was Jimi's unusual opening number at the Isle Of Wight Festival concert?
- 2 In the song *Spanish Castle Magic* Jimi mentions travelling by what form of unconventional transport?
a) London Bus b) Spaceship c) Dragonfly
- 3 Jimi Hendrix was renamed 'James Marshall' by his father when he was five years old. What were his original christian names?

When you think you have the answers, pop them down on a postcard and send them to: Hendrix Competition, Guitarist, Alexander House, Forehill, Ely, Cambs CB7 4AF. The closing date is September 29th 1995. Usual rules apply.



Black Beauty

Twenty-five years after it last rocked the world, Jimi Hendrix's favourite guitar resurfaces from a long period in exile. In this exclusive pictorial Tim Slater gives an appraisal of the instrument last seen in Jimi's hands at the 1970 Isle Of Wight Festival

Although arguably not as universally famous as the white Fender Stratocaster he used at Woodstock, Jimi's black 'Isle Of Wight' Strat takes on a far greater significance when you realise that this is the last guitar he ever played. Not only that, but the fact that Monika Dannemann has preserved the instrument *exactly* as Jimi last played it places this guitar in the unique position of being, for many, a quasi-religious artefact. Monika clearly remembers Jimi sitting quietly in their flat the night before he died strumming the guitar while he worked on his last song, the lyrics of which later surfaced as a poem entitled *The Story Of Life*.

"Jimi told me that if he didn't make it, the guitar is mine," Monika explains. "I remember after his death that I was so in shock that I gave people more or less what they wanted but when they wanted the guitar I said no because Jimi said he wanted me to have it."

Hendrix obtained the guitar in October 1968 and the first pictorial evidence of its use shows him working in TGC Studios in Hollywood around the same period. Another deeply significant point about this individual Stratocaster is that it actually marked Jimi's wholesale transition to playing maple necked Strats after a

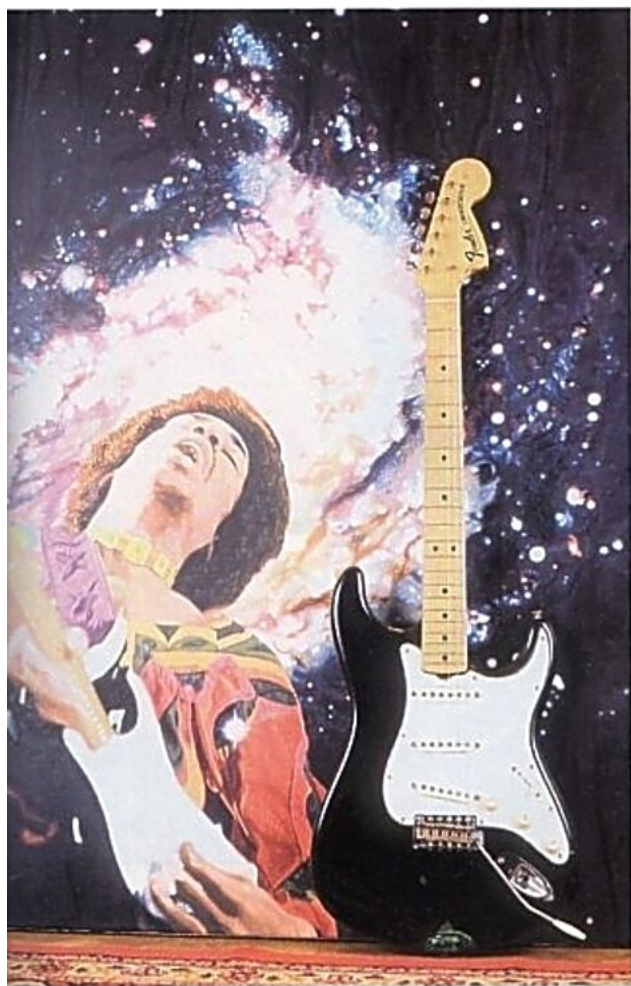
long period using various rosewood necked models. History clearly shows that the decision to switch was a wise one as he obviously preferred maple necks, a fact further backed up as he continued to use both the black and the famous white Strat almost exclusively from late 68 right up to September 1970, never appearing to demonstrate similar loyalty to any of his rosewood necked instruments.

Since that fateful day the guitar has been stored in a bank vault where it has remained untouched and unseen for a quarter of a century – until now. On July 28 Monika generously allowed *Guitarist* the unique opportunity to subject this Stratocaster to its first close scrutiny since Jimi died. We weren't allowed to touch it; indeed, nobody except Monika has touched the guitar since September 1970, and *she* only touches it when she *has* to. "It's a big part of Jimi because the guitar was such a big part of him," Monika admits. "It was part of his soul and his spirit. I never touch the guitar unless it's necessary because I want everything of Jimi that he put in there to stay in there."

Lovingly preserved just as Jimi left it, the guitar consequently presents an awesome and somewhat eerie spectacle: Jimi's original strings are still intact and even his suede guitar strap is still with the guitar in its original Fender case. Monika isn't sure exactly why he



Photos: James Cunpsy



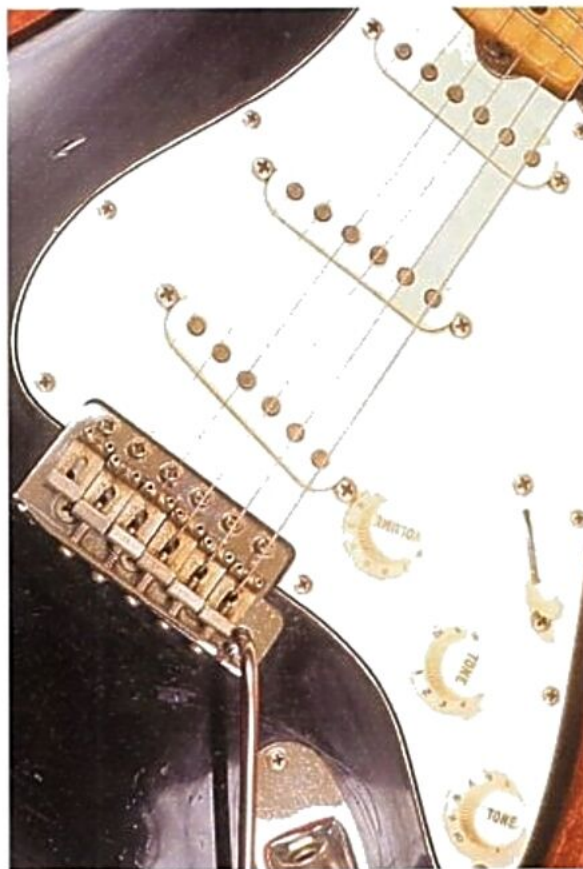
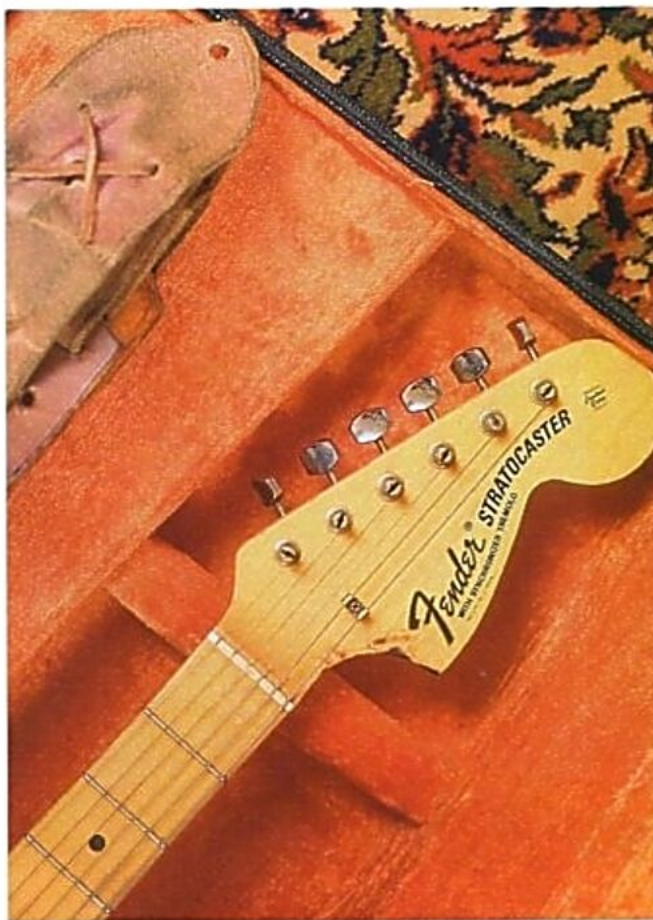
► loved this guitar so much but she confirms that it really was his number one.

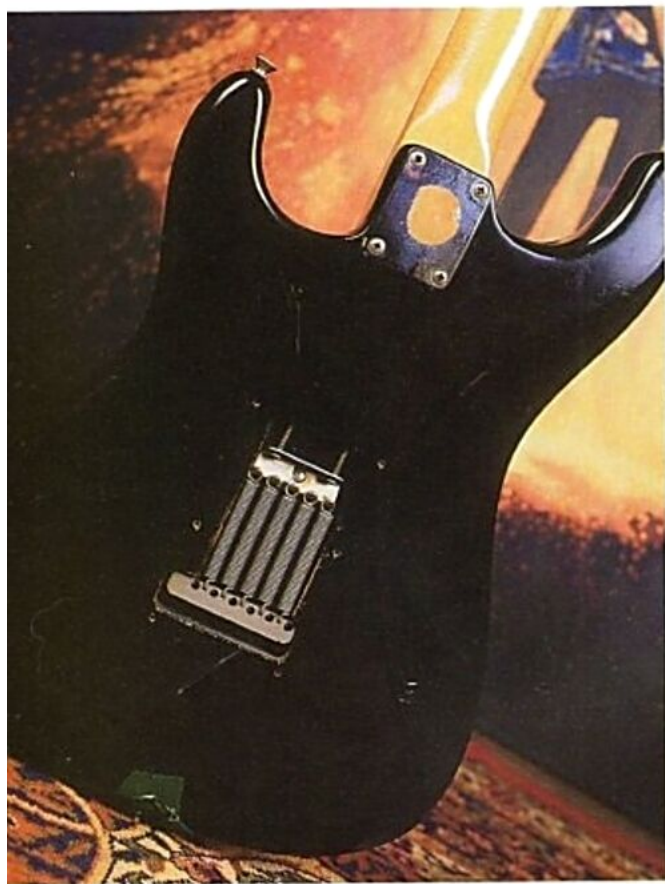
"He carried that guitar everywhere with him from the end of 1968 right to the end," Monika smiles. "If he was doing any jamming or anything like that, this was the guitar that went with him, it really was his favourite one. Whoever saw this guitar called it 'Black Beauty' and Jimi loved the name. He was playing it all the time, even during the last evening he used it during the night sitting there working on a song. The lyrics are quite famous and the song has become known as *The Story Of Life*. Jimi didn't call it that, it's just other people have named it so. Unfortunately the strap has faded, it was all mauve and even though I keep it out of sunlight the colour just sort of vanished and faded."

Black Beauty is absolutely covered in classic tell tale signs that this was one of Jimi's guitars. The headstock clearly bears several cigarette burns, a typical effect of Jimi's habit of jamming a lighted ciggy in between the strings and letting it burn down to a stub while he played. The body too shows evidence of Hendrix's heavy duty playing style; not forgetting that Jimi played his Strats upside down, the guitar's upper body horn (the lower horn as Jimi would have viewed it) is bashed to smithereens under the impact of Jimi's huge rings as he reached for the upper frets so that an area of finish roughly the size of a 10 pence piece has been worn away revealing the bare wood underneath. The whole of the body is laced with hundreds of tiny – and some not so tiny – chips, dings and dents which, if only they could talk, would doubtless add their own individual tales about what concerts Jimi played or which songs he was writing or playing when he caused them.

The green tape at the bottom of the guitar was put there by Jimi ►

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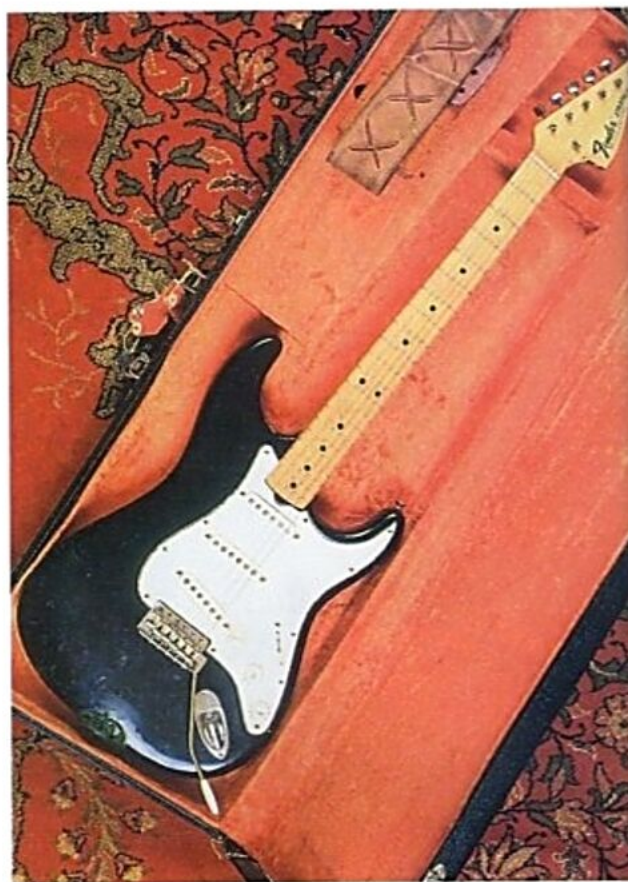




➤ as a temporary repair when the strap button came loose. Monika takes up the story: "It broke but because it was his favourite guitar he didn't want to play with any other and so he just put this tape on. I was going to take the tape off but I thought, no that's wrong because that's how it was at the very end."

If you watch the video of Jimi's performance at the Isle Of Wight Festival you can clearly spot this typical example of Hendrix's spot of guitar DIY which confirms that this Strat really has been held in suspended animation since it was last seen in public as unfortunately Jimi never had time to carry out a more permanent repair.

The first thing that you notice about the back of the guitar is that the plastic trem cavity cover is removed. The first reason most Strat owners do this is to facilitate quick string changes but Hendrix typically applied his lateral approach to exploit more sounds from his Strat by actually *playing* the exposed tremolo springs – an incredibly spooky effect which crops up on the magnificent live recording of *Machine Gun* from the 'Band Of Gypsies' album, a performance which actually features this guitar in full cry! Why did Jimi prefer to fit his trem with the maximum five springs? One can only guess... Despite the springs' intense pull, the bridge has been adjusted to 'float' properly so that Jimi could pull up on the trem as well as push down and he must have had an amazing amount of strength to manipulate the trem as skilfully and sensitively as he did. Beyond the expected level of wear and tear caused by Hendrix's playing style, the maple neck is generally in surprisingly good condition. Looking closer, you'll notice the absence of both a walnut 'skunk stripe' down the back of the neck and the small walnut fillet at the headstock to plug the hole where the truss rod is inserted into the neck. This is because during the late 60s Fender had only recently reintroduced maple necks as an option and had changed the method of manufacture: they previously built their maple necks from a single plank of wood but Black Beauty's



fingerboard is unusual in that it has been applied separately *after* the truss rod was laid in a groove in the front of the neck and sealed in with a fillet of maple. The neck is finished in polyester lacquer and unlike many later examples where the lacquer was applied much too thickly, Hendrix's guitar seems to have been fairly thinly covered.

In testament to Monika's claims that this was Jimi's number one guitar, the frets are fairly well worn and an interesting point is that the wear seems to be fairly uniform even though Jimi tended to play a lot in the middle area of the neck. The pickups have staggered pole pieces, although for all the long hours Jimi spent personally modifying his instruments to suit his left handed playing style he didn't bother to turn his pickups around to compensate for the fact that he played an ordinary right handed Strat strung left handed. What contribution 'upside down' pickups actually made to Hendrix's vast tonal palette is debatable, but it certainly didn't get in his way that's for sure!

One thing we dearly *ached* to do was to have the opportunity to plug the guitar in and actually be able to hear what it sounded like after all this time, but unfortunately we were unable to do so. Even standing quietly by itself it still seems to glow with a strange aura of its own and Monika agrees that whenever she is near the guitar it seems to increase the ever present sensation that Jimi is somewhere nearby.

How much is the guitar worth? It's impossible to tell, but when you consider that the white Woodstock Strat fetched £198,000 at auction several years ago, then this equally well documented and arguably more significant guitar (in that it was Jimi's favourite) must be worth around half a million at least. But to Monika Dannemann its value is beyond words: "I would never sell it for anything, but I would love to have it in a museum for everybody to see and not just for a private buyer who'll tuck it away somewhere nobody can ever see it again."